SECRET EMPIRE: OPENING SALVO

MARVEL

#16

SPENCER
LIBRANDA
CINAR
MALIN
ROSENBERG

Steve ★ Rogers

CAPTAIN AMERICA®

Super-Soldier. Avenger. Agent of Hydra. He is...

Steve Rogers CAPTAIN AMERICA

Steve Rogers' reality has been secretly rewritten by Kobik, a sentient Cosmic Cube acting under the influence of the Red Skull. In Steve's new history, a Hydra agent named Elisa Sinclair--A.K.A. Madame Hydra--took Steve from his mother and enrolled him in a school where he was trained to believe in Hydra's ideals. He also befriended a young Helmut Zemo, whose father, Heinrich, would later be killed by Bucky Barnes.

In the present, Zemo and Madame Hydra have returned to Steve's side, and the pieces are falling into place for a complete Hydra takeover. Steve killed the Red Skull and assumed control of his forces, Madame Hydra gathered a new Hydra High Council, and Zemo routed the Thunderbolts and captured Bucky, but Kobik was shattered in the process.* Meanwhile, fugitive former S.H.I.E.L.D. Director Maria Hill is closing in on the truth...

*WARNING! READ THIS ISSUE AFTER THUNDERBOLTS #12, ON SALE NOW!

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ENGLAND.
1945.

STEVEN, MY DEAR...

...YOU'VE BARELY UTTERED A WORD THE WHOLE JOURNEY. NOT THAT I MINDED ENTIRELY, I DID GET TO FINISH MY BOOK.

GERALD GARDNER, SUCH AN EXHIBITIONIST.

HOW CAN YOU ***READ*** AT A TIME LIKE THIS, ELISA?!

"HYDRA IS ***LOST***.

"THE ***RED SKULL*** HAS ***TAKEN*** IT FROM US.

"MEANWHILE, MY BEST FRIEND IS SITTING IN AN ALLIED PRISON CELL, WAITING FOR THE ***FIRING SQUAD***...

"AND ON TOP OF EVERYTHING-- NOW YOU TELL ME THE AMERICANS HAVE DEVELOPED SOME KIND OF ***SUPER-WEAPON*** THAT WILL HELP THEM WIN THE WAR."

YOU ASK ME WHAT I'M THINKING, ELISA...

...I'M THINKING THIS IS THE *END*.

HM. I SEE. HOW DREADFUL.

WELL, PERHAPS YOU'RE RIGHT, DARLING. BUT THEN, YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY: WHEN YOU THINK YOU'VE REACHED THE END--

--IT HELPS TO GO BACK TO WHERE IT ALL BEGAN.

WELCOME BACK TO *THE KEEP*, STEVEN.

WELCOME HOME.

BAGALIA. TODAY.

Maria Hill's log--

Okay. yes-- it's been a rough month.

I was ousted as director of S.H.I.E.L.D.--

--by the very tribunal I established. Humiliating.

From there, I've just been wandering, looking for a way back in.

Which led me to Bagalia, where a couple of mercenary types-- Taskmaster and the Black Ant--made some very big promises.

They said they had something that could bring down the new director of S.H.I.E.L.D.-- Steve Rogers, Captain America himself.

They never showed up with the goods--

--but I was curious enough--okay, desperate enough--

--that I had to see what they found.

It took me a few minutes, but once I was in Taskmaster's place, I got what I came for--

--and then some.

HAIL HYDRA.

There must be some explanation. This has to be a fake. There's no way this can be--

--real.

I HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR THIS, PRETENDER...

TO SEE YOU PUNISHED FOR ALL THE THINGS YOU HAVE DONE TO ME.

YOU TURNED MY OWN FOLLOWERS, THE THUNDERBOLTS, AGAINST ME, CLAIMING THEM FOR YOUR OWN.

YOU EVEN STOLE MY COSMIC CUBE!

YOUR SINS ARE SO MANY, AND SPAN ACROSS REALITIES--

--BUT NOW, AT LAST, YOU WILL ANSWER FOR THEM.

NOW YOU WILL BEHOLD ZEMO'S TRIUMPH!

FIXER--DOCTOR SELVIG--WHAT IS OUR PROGRESS?

UNCHANGED FROM THE *LAST* TIME YOU ASKED US FOR AN UPDATE, ZEMO.

YEAH, FIVE MINUTES AGO.

FORGIVE MY *IMPATIENCE,* FIXER.

PERHAPS IT'S DUE TO THE FACT THAT I WAS PROMISED THE CUBE *HOURS* AGO--

--OR PERHAPS IT IS BECAUSE I WATCHED YOUR MISCALCULATIONS SEND THE FRAGMENTS WE'D WORKED SO HARD TO RETRIEVE MILES AWAY, LOST TO US ACROSS THE ARCTIC!

UH-HUH, I GET IT--I SCREWED UP, FINE. BUT LOOK, WE'RE ON TOP OF IT--WE HAVE SEVEN OF THE EIGHT COSMIC CUBE FRAGMENTS BACK, LOCKED IN AND READY--

"--AND MOONSTONE AND ATLAS ARE OUT THERE LOOKING FOR THE LAST ONE RIGHT NOW."

WELL, YOU HAD BETTER HOPE THEY FIND IT SOON. WE *MUST* BUILD THAT CUBE--

AH, OR, ALTERNATIVE THESIS--WE COULD SIMPLY ALLOW THE FRAGMENT TO RECONSTITUTE AS *KOBIK,* AND CONVINCE THE GIRL TO DO WHAT YOU NEED...CERTAINLY A SIMPLER SOLUTION--

SELVIG, YOU SENTIMENTAL OLD FOOL...I AM NOT TAKING ANY MORE RISKS ON THIS "CHILD" YOU ALL SEEM SO PRECIOUS ABOUT.

SHE IS A DANGER TO US ALL. SHE HAS WREAKED NOTHING BUT *CHAOS* THROUGHOUT HER SHORT EXISTENCE.

I DO NOT NEED AN ADORABLE LITTLE RUG RAT PULLING ON MY HEART-STRINGS, YOU UNDERSTAND? I NEED *OBEDIENCE. COMPLIANCE.* SHE DOES NOT NEED SENTIENCE TO PROVIDE THOSE THINGS.

SHE ONLY NEEDS TO BE HER *TRUE SELF...*

...SHE ONLY NEEDS TO BE A *CUBE.*

NOW, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME--I HAVE OTHER TRULY DELIGHTFUL BUSINESS TO ATTEND TO.

AW, COME ON.

NOT AGAIN.

1945.

NOW, LET'S SEE IF WE CAN FIND A KETTLE AND AN **OPEN FLAME,** YES? I'M POSITIVELY DRAINED--

ELISA-- WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?!

WHY WOULD YOU BRING ME BACK HERE? WHY WOULD YOU WANT ME TO **SEE** THIS?

JUST SO I'D KNOW THAT EVERYTHING I EVER WORKED FOR-- EVERYTHING I EVER **FOUGHT** FOR--WAS LOST? YOU THINK I DON'T REALIZE THAT ALREADY?

HYDRA IS **RUINED.** WE THOUGHT WE COULD MANIPULATE THE REICH TO SUIT OUR WHIMS, AND INSTEAD THEY **DEVOURED US WHOLE.**

BUT THEN AGAIN, MAYBE IT'S WHAT WE **DESERVE.** MAYBE ALL OF THIS ISN'T WHAT I TOLD MYSELF IT WAS.

MAYBE IT WAS ALL A **LIE.** YOU SAID THIS WAS WHERE IT ALL BEGAN--

--BUT IT WASN'T. NOT FOR **ME.** I WASN'T BORN HERE LIKE SOME OF THE OTHERS. I WAS **BROUGHT** HERE.

AFTER YOU **TOOK** ME--

"--AFTER YOU **KILLED MY MOTHER.**"

OH, STEVEN--

NO. DON'T.

IT TOOK ME ***YEARS*** TO ACCEPT IT. AND EVEN THEN, I TRIED TO TELL MYSELF THAT--THAT ALL OF THIS HAD HAPPENED FOR A PURPOSE. THAT SHE DIED FOR A REASON.

BUT THAT ISN'T ***TRUE,*** IS IT?

IT WAS JUST MADMEN THIRSTING FOR POWER. THE IDEALS, THE BELIEFS--NONE OF IT WAS ***REAL***. JUST WHAT YOU TOLD THE CANNON FODDER.

AND NOW ALL THAT'S LEFT IS TO POUR SALT IN THE WOUND BEFORE YOU SEND ME OUT ON ANOTHER MISSION. PROBABLY MY ***LAST.***

LET'S JUST GET ON WITH IT THEN.

-SIGH- MY BOY. MY LITTLE WARRIOR. DO YOU REALLY THINK ***THAT'S*** WHY WE CAME HERE? SO THAT I COULD ***TAUNT*** YOU? TORTURE YOU?

I'VE TOLD YOU SO MANY TIMES, AND YET STILL YOU REFUSE TO BELIEVE-- EVER SINCE THE DAY I FIRST LAID EYES ON YOU, I HAVE LOVED YOU LIKE YOU WERE MY OWN.

BUT YOU ARE ***NOT*** MY OWN. I HAVE ALWAYS UNDERSTOOD THAT.

I DIDN'T BRING YOU HERE TO GIVE YOU ANOTHER MISSION--

STEVEN?

--I BROUGHT YOU HERE SO THAT I COULD FULFILL MY PROMISE.

...MOM?

MOM-- IS IT--IS IT REALLY--?

IT'S ME.

MOM!

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S YOU--

I KNOW, SON--I KNOW--

NOW.

Steve Rogers is Hydra.

Captain America is Hydra. Which means one thing--

--we are all screwed!

One glance at the trouble map, and I can see where it's all headed. His plan's already underway. Would be nearly impossible to stop him now--

--and besides, I don't have much time before they catch up to me.

Gotta use my one phone call wisely.

Only takes a second to realize there's only one person who can still bring down S.H.I.E.L.D. from the inside--one person who could get the message out to the whole world--

--God help us all.

Y'ELLO. GO FOR RICK JONES.

ATLAS TO FIXER-- GOOD NEWS--

WE FOUND THE LAST FRAGMENT. YOU'RE WELCOME.

BRINGING IT BACK TO BASE NOW.

OH, THANK GOD. ONE MORE HOUR AND I'M PRETTY SURE ZEMO WOULD'VE LOST IT. WELL, EVEN MORE THAN USUAL.

LET'S GET IT READY--FETCH ME THE LAST CONTAINMENT UNIT.

SHE'S *DOOMED*, THEN...MY LITTLE GIRL...

"MY KOBIK."

I CAN'T LET THEM DO THIS TO YOU...

HEY, DOC, I DON'T LIKE IT ANY MORE THAN *YOU* DO, BUT WE HAVE TO GET THIS SHOW ON THE ROAD.

UH, Y-YES, SORRY--JUST LOOKING--AH, THERE WE ARE--

--I'VE *FOUND* IT.

I MAY NOT BE ABLE TO *SAVE* YOU, BUT I CAN AT LEAST GIVE YOU A CHANCE, KOBIK.

JUST HAVE TO GET YOU FAR, FAR FROM HERE...

THERE IS NO NEED TO STRUGGLE ANY MORE, BARNES--

--YOU'LL FIND PEACE SOON ENOUGH.

ZEMO--

DO YOU LIKE IT? THIS ***LAB,*** I MEAN--I HAD THEM RE-CREATE IT--A PERFECT REPLICA...

...OF THE PLACE YOU ***MURDERED*** MY FATHER.

I MURDERED ***HIM?!*** HEINRICH ZEMO TRIED TO KILL ME ***AND*** STEVE--HE'S THE REASON I WAS TURNED INTO THE ***WINTER SOLDIER.*** HE'S THE ONE WHO TRAPPED STEVE IN THE ICE! HE WAS A ***MADMAN--***

--JUST LIKE ***YOU.***

-SIGH- BUCKY, BUCKY, BUCKY...WHY DO YOU CLING TO THESE ***LIES?*** I KNOW THE GIRL SHOWED YOU THE TRUTH--

THE ***TRUTH?*** KOBIK IS A CONFUSED KID--WHATEVER SHE CHANGED--WHATEVER SHE DID TO STEVE-- NONE OF IT'S ***REAL.***

HH. HOW LITTLE YOU SEEM TO KNOW ABOUT THE MAN YOU CLAIM IS YOUR BROTHER.

BUT YOU SHOULD KNOW HE STILL ***CARES*** FOR YOU. I SUPPOSE NO MATTER WHAT THE REALITY, HE'S ALWAYS A SENTIMENTALIST--HE COULDN'T EVEN BRING HIMSELF TO BE HERE, IN FACT--

--BUT HE DID WANT ME TO GIVE YOU THIS MESSAGE.

HELLO, BUCKY--I'M SORRY I'M NOT THERE RIGHT NOW--

--YOU DESERVE A **PROPER GOODBYE,** AFTER ALL.

I--I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT NOT EVERYTHING YOU REMEMBER WAS FALSE. YOU WERE A GOOD AND LOYAL FRIEND DURING THE WAR. AND I DIDN'T ENJOY BETRAYING YOUR TRUST BACK THEN--

--BUT THE FACT IS, WE SERVE DIFFERENT SIDES. WE BELIEVE DIFFERENT THINGS. AND I THINK I KNOW YOU WELL ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND I CAN NEVER CHANGE YOUR MIND ABOUT THAT.

AND UNFORTUNATELY, THERE'S ALSO THE FACT THAT, NO MATTER WHAT YOU REMEMBER, YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF A GREAT MAN.

AND HELMUT DESERVES **JUSTICE** FOR THAT. I WISH--

TURN IT OFF.

SORRY?

I SAID TURN IT OFF!

BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND. YOUR DEAR STEVE ROGERS, YOUR CLOSEST FRIEND AND ALLY--

THAT'S NOT STEVE.

THAT'S **NOT** STEVE.

IT'S NOT TRUE... IT'S NOT TRUE...

TSK. POOR BUCKY. YOU STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND, DO YOU? FACTS, ***REALITY***--THESE THINGS ARE SIMPLY WHAT WE ***MAKE*** THEM.

I HAVE DECIDED WHAT ***I*** BELIEVE. AND IF THIS STORY STEVEN TELLS IS A ***LIE***--

LAUNCH

--THEN I WILL MAKE IT *TRUE.*

GOODBYE, PRETENDER.

1945.

I'M SURPRISED TO SEE YOU UP SO EARLY--

--GIVEN HOW LATE INTO THE NIGHT I HEARD ALL THE REMINISCING AND LAUGHTER.

I HOPE WE DIDN'T KEEP YOU UP...

NONSENSE, IT WAS MUSIC TO MY EARS.

SO ALL THOSE YEARS AGO--

ONE OF THOSE BRUTES THAT ACCOMPANIED ME DID IN FACT **STRIKE** HER--AND I'M SORRY FOR THAT, STEVEN. TRUST THAT HE WAS SEVERELY REPRIMANDED.

BUT IT WAS LITTLE MORE THAN A BUMP ON THE HEAD.

AND SINCE THEN, SHE'S BEEN VERY WELL-PROVIDED-FOR--

I KNOW.

AND WE KEPT HER CLOSELY INFORMED ON HOW YOU WERE DOING-- PHOTOGRAPHS, REPORT CARDS, SOME OF YOUR DRAWINGS, EVEN--

ELISA--

--I KNOW.

I ONLY WISH YOU COULD HAVE BEEN REUNITED SOONER. BUT WE KNEW IF YOU WERE TO BECOME EVERYTHING WE NEEDED YOU TO BE--

THIS HAD TO BE THE WAY. I UNDERSTAND. AND I'M SORRY FOR THE THINGS I SAID BEFORE--

NONSENSE, DEAR BOY. WE ALL FACE CRISES OF FAITH FROM TIME TO TIME.

WELL, IT'S OVER NOW.

TELL ME ABOUT THIS MISSION.

THE ALLIES HAVE BUILT A ***SUPERWEAPON***-- FORGED FROM DARK MAGICKS OLDER THAN TIME AND PULLED FORTH FROM THE AETHER.

"THEY CALL IT A ***COSMIC CUBE.***"

WITH IT, THEY WILL BE ABLE TO CHANGE REALITY ITSELF. MAKE IT SO THEY, NOT HYDRA, WIN THE WAR. RESHAPE THE WORLD AS THEY SEE FIT, MAKE US ALL BELIEVE WE HAVE LED DIFFERENT LIVES--

THAT--THAT'S ***IMPOSSIBLE.***

IT IS ***NOT.*** THE SIGHT HAS SHOWN ME. BUT THAT IS NOT ***ALL*** THAT IT REVEALED TO ME...

YOU WILL SURVIVE THE CHANGE. MANY YEARS FROM NOW, YOU WILL AWAKEN FROM THE LIE THEY BUILD FOR YOU--

--AND YOU WILL RESTORE EVERYTHING THEY TOOK FROM US.

IT WILL NOT BE EASY. YOU WILL BE A STRANGER IN A STRANGE WORLD. YOUR FRIENDS WILL BELIEVE THEMSELVES TO BE YOUR ENEMIES, AND YOUR ENEMIES YOUR FRIENDS.

YOU WILL BE A MAN OUT OF NOT ONLY TIME, BUT ***REALITY ITSELF.***

YOU WILL HAVE TO HIDE YOUR TRUE SELF FROM EVERYONE AROUND YOU. AND YOU WILL SACRIFICE SO MUCH. I WOULD GIVE ***ANYTHING*** TO SHIELD YOU FROM THIS BURDEN, MY DEAR--

ELISA...

...WHAT DO YOU NEED ME TO DO?

FIRST, YOU WILL GO FREE YOUR FRIEND HELMUT, AND HELP HIM GET THE VENGEANCE HE SO DESERVES. BUT YOU WILL TELL HIM NOTHING OF THIS MISSION.

FROM THERE, A PLANE WILL TAKE YOU FAR FROM HERE--

"--AND DEEP INTO THE PACIFIC THEATER.

"THE KRAKEN WILL GUIDE YOU FROM THERE."

THE PLACE HE WILL TAKE YOU IS THE ONE HE WAS SWORN TO PROTECT. THE SOURCE OF ALL OUR POWER. WHERE HYDRA WAS BIRTHED.

THERE, YOU WILL BE SORELY TESTED, BODY AND SOUL. BUT IT IS THE KEY TO YOUR SURVIVING THE CHANGE.

I UNDERSTAND. BUT, ELISA... IF EVERYTHING IS CHANGED--WHAT ABOUT MY ***MOTHER?*** ***HELMUT?*** WHAT ABOUT ***YOU?***

ON THIS, THE SIGHT IS UNCLEAR. BUT KNOW THIS, STEVEN--

--I WILL CALL UPON THE ELDER GODS. I WILL CONSULT THE FORBIDDEN BOOKS. I WILL SELL MY OWN ***SOUL*** IF I HAVE TO. NO MATTER WHAT IT TAKES--

"--WE WILL BE TOGETHER AGAIN SOMEDAY."

NOW.

I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE IT--YOU'RE *HERE.*

I *PROMISED* YOU, DIDN'T I? YOU KNOW HOW I AM ABOUT SUCH THINGS, SILLY BOY. OH, AND I BROUGHT YOU A PRESENT.

MAY I INTRODUCE TO YOU--

--THE NEW *HIGH COUNCIL OF HYDRA.*

HAIL HYDRA.

THEY WILL STAND BY YOUR SIDE AS YOU RULE, ONCE YOUR PLAN IS REALIZED--

RIGHT-- ABOUT THE PLAN-- I'M AFRAID THERE HAVE BEEN SOME LAST-MINUTE *HICCUPS--*

YOU MEAN YOU LACK XAVIER'S BRAIN. NOT TO WORRY, MY DEAR. PRESUMING THE DIRECTOR OF S.H.I.E.L.D. CAN REACH OUT TO HIS WAITING SHIP--

S.H.I.E.L.D. HELICARRIER CRESCENT.

ALL RIGHT, LOOK ALIVE, PEOPLE--WE ARE ENTERING SOKOVIAN AIRSPACE.

THE COUNTRY HAS OFFICIALLY SURRENDERED TO A HYDRA INSURGENCY, WHICH IS NOW THREATENING OUR MEMBER NATIONS' CAPITALS WITH NUCLEAR RETALIATION IF THEIR DEMANDS AREN'T MET.

OUR JOB IS TO TAKE AWAY THEIR LEVERAGE.

WE HAVE THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE, SO FIGHTERS, PREPARE TO LAUNCH--

AHEM, IF I MAY INTERRUPT--YOUR SELF HAS BEEN UNSHACKLED.

YOU FEEL THE CALMNESS WASH OVER YOU, YOU FEEL IT MAKE YOU STILL, AND PRESENT.

YOU ARE PERFECTLY CONTENT.

THERE IS NO NEED TO FIGHT...

...NO NEED TO BE AFRAID...

...YOU NO LONGER HAVE TO STRUGGLE.

FAUSTUS IS YOUR MASTER NOW.

--THEY'LL BE PATIENTLY WAITING TO WELCOME US ON BOARD...SUPREME LEADER.

THANK YOU, DOCTOR. NOW THAT THAT'S TAKEN CARE OF--

HOLD ON NOW, WE AIN'T OUT OF THE WOODS YET.

SORRY, UH-- HAIL HYDRA, BOSS.

THAT'S NEVER NOT GONNA BE *WEIRD*.

TASKMASTER. WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

WE BEEN MONITORING MARIA HILL--SENT A SQUAD AFTER HER, EVEN. BUT LOOKS LIKE SHE'S MAKIN' A PHONE CALL, TO YOUR OLD PAL--

"--RICK JONES."

RICK-- IT'S HILL!

LIKE, ***MARIA*** HILL? THE ONE THAT GOT ***FIRED?*** WOW, IF YOU'RE CALLING ME FOR A ***REFERENCE***, I AM STILL TECHNICALLY A ***FELON***--

LISTEN TO ME, IDIOT--WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME--YOU ***HAVE*** TO HELP ME STOP HIM--

SORRY, STOP ***WHO?***

STEVE ROGERS--

KSK

--STEVE ROGERS IS HYDRA!

WHAAA

RICK-- RICK, ARE YOU THERE? IT'S CAP--

PLEASE HOLD.

UH, HEY, CAP, THAT'S WEIRD, I WAS JUST HAVING A CONVERSATION ABOUT YOU--

WITH MARIA HILL, RIGHT? WHATEVER SHE SAID--IT'S A **TRAP,** RICK. DID YOU MANAGE TO GET THE ACCESS CODES FOR THE PLANETARY DEFENSE SHIELD?

UM-- YEAH. JUST FINISHED, ACTUALLY--

AND THAT'S WHY SHE'S CALLING. SHE SET CAROL UP--GOT HER TO BUILD THE SHIELD FOR HER, WHILE SHE KEPT HER OWN OVERRIDE CODES.

WITH THE CHITAURI WAVE COMING, SHE'S PLANNING TO USE THEM AS ***LEVERAGE***--FORCE THE WORLD SECURITY COUNCIL TO GIVE HER BACK HER OLD JOB--SHE'S OUT OF CONTROL--

OKAY, **THAT** ACTUALLY MAKES SENSE-- SO WE SHOULD TELL CAPTAIN MARVEL, RIGHT?

THERE'S NO TIME--THE WAVE IS INCOMING NOW! I NEED THOSE ***ACCESS CODES***--

RIGHT, BUT-- BEFORE THAT, YOU SHOULD KNOW--HILL IS SAYING YOU'RE--AND BELIEVE ME, I KNOW HOW ***CRAZY*** THIS SOUNDS-- SHE SAID YOU WERE ***HYDRA.***

RICK.

YEAH, NO, I GET IT--

"THIS IS ***MARIA HILL*** WE'RE TALKING ABOUT, RICK. THE SAME PERSON WHO CHASED YOU AROUND THE WORLD TRYING TO ARREST YOU WHEN YOU EXPOSED KOBIK.

"THE SAME PERSON WHO CREATED ***PLEASANT HILL.*** WHO HELPED START THE CIVIL WAR OVER THE REGISTRATION ACT. MADRIPOOR. LATVERIA-- DO I NEED TO KEEP GOING ON?"

YOU CAN'T TRUST HER, RICK-- **EVER.** BUT IF YOU FEEL LIKE YOU NEED TO WAIT--DESPITE THE RISKS--

NO--NO, YOU'RE RIGHT, CAP--I DON'T TRUST HER--

--I TRUST **YOU.** SENDING CODES NOW.

AW, MAN, BAD CALL. BUT HEY, IF IT MAKES YA FEEL BETTER--

--I'DA MADE THE SAME BET.

JONES IS DOWN. ALL THE CODES GO THROUGH?

YES, THIS IS EVERYTHING WE'LL NEED TO GET INSIDE...IT'S GOOD WORK. GET RICK INTO HOLDING--DO **NOT** HURT HIM.

UNDERSTOOD, WEIRD CAPTAIN HYDRA GUY. BLACK ANT OUT.

IF THAT'S ALL FINISHED, YOUR TROOPS ARE ASSEMBLED IN THE MOUNTAINS. THEY ARE WAITING TO HEAR FROM THEIR NEW LEADER.

YEAH--WE SET UP THE SCREENS, BUT THEY WON'T BE ABLE TO SEE YOUR FACE, DON'T WORRY.

GOOD.

THIS IS IT, THEN, YES? IT'S ALL FINALLY HAPPENING. YOUR PLAN IS ABOUT TO BE REALIZED--

ACTUALLY, STEVEN--

--THERE IS SOMETHING I NEED TO TELL YOU FIRST.

I CAN'T **BELIEVE** THIS! WE WERE **THIS CLOSE,** ELISA! AND AFTER ALL THIS-- WE FAILED. IT'S **OVER.**

CALM DOWN, STEVEN--

CALM DOWN?! HOW CAN YOU SAY CALM DOWN?! WE **LOST** THE **COSMIC CUBE FRAGMENTS!**

I **UNDERSTAND** THAT--

THEY WERE THE KEY TO EVERYTHING--TO SAVING THE WORLD THAT WAS--

I UNDERSTAND THAT, AS WELL. BUT LISTEN TO ME, STEVEN--

--WHAT'S DONE IS DONE. AND I HAVE SUFFERED TOO MUCH TO LET THIS BREAK ME NOW.

THE PLAN WAS ALWAYS TWOFOLD--CONQUER THIS WORLD AND THEN RESTORE THE OLD ONE. TO SHOW IT THE ERROR OF ITS WAYS.

NONE OF THAT NEEDS TO CHANGE.

YOU WILL **STILL** TAKE POWER. AND YOU WILL USE THAT POWER TO **FIND** THOSE FRAGMENTS AND RESHAPE THE EARTH TO YOUR WILL.

ONE MORE CHALLENGE. ONE MORE TEST. THAT'S ALL THIS IS. REMEMBER--

--THIS IS WHAT YOU WERE MEANT TO DO.

NOW, GET IN THERE. I HAVE WAITED **LIFETIMES** TO SEE YOU LEAD THIS ARMY TO VICTORY.

GO ADDRESS YOUR SOLDIERS, SUPREME LEADER--

"--YOUR REIGN IS AT HAND."

I UNDERSTAND THAT MANY OF YOU MUST BE CONFUSED RIGHT NOW--WONDERING WHO THIS MAN IS WHO CLAIMS TO BE YOUR NEW LEADER.

AND I WISH THAT I COULD SHOW YOU MY FACE, THAT I COULD LOOK YOU IN THE EYE--

--BUT THE TIME IS NOT YET RIGHT, I'M AFRAID.

THE SKULL TOLD YOU HYDRA WAS AN OUTLET FOR YOUR ANGER. HE CHANNELED YOUR RAGE TO SUIT HIS OWN ENDS--

--BUT I AM HERE TO TELL YOU THAT HYDRA IS SO MUCH MORE.

IT HAS EXISTED SINCE THE DAWN OF MAN, PERSEVERED THROUGH DYNASTIES AND EMPIRES. TO BELONG TO IT IS TO BELONG TO SOMETHING FAR GREATER THAN YOURSELVES.

COUNTLESS YEARS AGO, A WHEEL WAS BUILT, AND SEATED AROUND IT WERE THE HEADS OF BROTHERHOODS AND ORGANIZATIONS--THE SHIELD, THE SPEAR, THE LEVIATHAN--

--AND THEY WERE PITTED AGAINST ONE ANOTHER, USED AS PAWNS BY MEN WHO BELIEVED THEMSELVES TO BE ENLIGHTENED AND ELITE.

WELL, I AM HERE TO END ALL THAT. I WILL NOT BE RULED BY THE WHEEL--I WILL RULE IT INSTEAD.

AND ALL OF US WILL BE PAWNS NO LONGER.

"THROUGH HYDRA, WE WILL BE MADE STRONG. TOGETHER.

"WE WILL FIGHT TO FORGE A BETTER WORLD.

CHK!

"NO MATTER THE COST."

CLICK!

HAIL HYDRA!

"A WORLD WHERE NO ONE IS PUT ABOVE ANY OTHER--WHERE ALL WORK TOGETHER FOR A COMMON CAUSE--EVER EXPANDING, EVER INCREASING.

"CUT OFF ONE LIMB AND TWO MORE SHALL TAKE ITS PLACE.

WELCOME TO THE PLANETARY DEFENSE SHIELD BASE STATION--

PLEASE HOLD FOR IDENTISCAN

"I WILL NOT LIE TO YOU LIKE THE SKULL DID--

"--THE PATH IN FRONT OF US IS NOT ANY EASY ONE.

JAMES Q. REED
S.H.I.E.L.D. TECHNICAL SUPPORT
CLEAR FOR ENTRY

"IT WILL BE DIFFICULT, AND TREACHEROUS--

HAIL HYDRA!

"--AND ALL OF US WILL BE CALLED UPON TO SACRIFICE.

"BUT KNOW THAT WE ARE STRIVING FOR SOMETHING WORTHY...

"UNITED, WE WILL ACHIEVE THE IMPOSSIBLE.

CAPTAIN MARVEL-- SHIELD'S DOWN, MA'AM!

WHAT?! THE WAVE HASN'T EVEN HIT YET--

NOT THE WAVE, MA'AM-- SOMEONE'S HIT THE BASE STATION!

INCOMING

"KNOW THAT I WILL NEVER ASK FROM YOU WHAT I AM NOT WILLING TO DO MYSELF.

"I HAVE GIVEN EVERYTHING TO THIS CAUSE--

STEVE...

"--AND I HAVE PAID A TERRIBLE PRICE.

"BUT I WILL NEVER WAVER, AND I EXPECT THE SAME FROM YOU--OUR VICTORY IS AT HAND!

"WE WILL EXPOSE THOSE WHO CLAIM TO LEAD US--WE WILL LAY BARE THEIR WEAKNESS, AND THEIR CORRUPTION!

"WE WILL BRING ORDER AND STRENGTH TO THE CHAOS!

"THIS IS THE HOUR, THIS IS THE PLACE--NOW, EVERYTHING CHANGES--"

--AND WHEN IT'S OVER, WHEN THE DUST SETTLES--THE WHOLE WORLD WILL KNEEL AND SAY THE WORDS...

HAIL HYDRA!

NEXT

STEVE ROGERS: CAPTAIN AMERICA #17

THUNDERBOLTS #12

U.S.AVENGERS #5

ZONE